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ABSTRACT

These materials have been designed for teachers in order to help students make more connections in their learning about the Holocaust. Written to enhance and supplement existing units in world history and world literature curricula in a California high school, the following materials have been prepared for the project: small group presentations of historical readings; a background lecture on the Holocaust in Poland and Hungary; the description of a slide presentation of Auschwitz Birkenau; and Hungarian and Polish poetry with reflective journal topics. These materials help to integrate World War II topics in history and literature. The world literature class uses Elie Wiesel's "Night" as its primary text for the Holocaust unit, while the world history class uses "History of the World: The Modern Era" as the primary text. (BT)

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ED 439 043

# The Holocaust in Poland and Hungary

Resources for an Integrated Unit on The Holocaust
Presented to the Polish - U.S. Fulbright Commission

by
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SO 030 781

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**Introduction:**

These materials have been designed to enhance and supplement existing units in our World History and World Literature curriculum. In an effort to help students make more connections in their learning, I am working with a team of teachers to pilot the integration of these courses in our district. Presently the World literature class uses Elie Wiesel's Night as its primary text for the Holocaust Unit and the primary text for the history class is History of the World: The Modern Era published by Houghton Miffin Company. The materials prepared in the project: a small group presentation of historical readings, a background lecture on both the Polish and Hungarian Holocausts, the description of a slide presentation of Auschwitz Birkenau, and Hungarian and Polish Poetry with reflective journal topics will be used to help facilitate the integration of the World War II studies in both history and literature.

**Special Thanks:**

The programs in both Poland and Hungary provided the most intensive and meaningful professional development that I have had as an educator. The materials and knowledge that I gleaned from the lectures and excursions will provide me and my colleagues with resources unavailable to us in any textbook. Andrzej, Ola, Huba, and Anna Maria were hosts who not only saw to all of our individual needs, but shared the most extraordinary portions of their countries with us. I am grateful to them for such a wonderful six weeks abroad.

**Project Objectives:**

The students will be able to:

- articulate a clear understanding of the political and historical events leading to the Holocaust in Hungary and Poland.
- articulate an understanding of the notion of ethnicity and ethnic minorities in Central Europe and the world history of anti-semitism.
- understand the systematic and inhumane nature of the concentration camps -- particularly in Auschwitz Birkenau.
- think critically about the dangers of blind obedience and totalitarianism.
- prepare journal reflections on reading and slide presentations.

**Small Group Presentations of Historical Reading:**

This activity is designed to provide students with a comprehensive background of the historical and political factors contributing to the Holocaust. Students in small groups will be assigned one chapter from The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary: Volumes 1 and 2 by Randolph L. Braham and God's Playground: A History of Poland Volume II 1795 to Present by Norman Davies. Both of these texts were recommended by lecturers in each respective country. After each group has read and discussed the reading, they will prepare a five to seven minute Power Point Presentation to the class of the key concepts of their assignment.

The following are the chapter titles and subtitles that students will read for their presentations:

From The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary: Volumes 1 and 2

- CH. 11 - The Road to Destruction (Antecedents to German Occupation in Hungary, Delivery of Jewish Workers for the German War Industry)
- CH. 15 - The First Anti-Jewish Measures (Arrests, Intimidations and Isolation of Jews)

- CH. 16 - The Process of Economic Destruction (The Pauperization of the Jews, German Expropriation of Jewish Property and Hungarian Reactions)

- CH 17 - Ghettoization Phase I (Ghettoization and Deportation Programs)

- CH 19 - Deportation (Demoralization of the Jews, German Camouflage Attempts, Hungarian Official Camouflage)

- CH 22 - The Last Phase: Zones V and VI and Auschwitz (The Concentration Process - Auschwitz and Other Concentration Camps)

From God's Playground: A History of Poland

- CH 20 - Poland in the Second World War 1939 - 1945 (This chapter should be divided among three separate groups. It includes pages 435-491.)

**Background Lecture Notes:**

The facts and information in this lecture come from five separate sources. Two of the sources are from lectures in Poland and Hungary by Adam Szostkiewicz and Dr. R. Braham respectively. The third is Voices From the Ground edited by Teresa and Henryk Swiebocki. The fourth source is the Auschwitz Birkenau Guide Book, and the final source of information are notes taken during a guided tour of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

The Polish Holocaust

- Poland was regarded by Germany as a colony. The plan was to eliminate Poland entirely and annex it to Germany settling Germans there. The Polish were considered a "lesser race" and were "marked for gradual annihilation." The concentration camps were designed to exterminate all the Polish population (Swiebocki, 5).

- The only national group not permitted to join the SS soldiers during the war were the Polish.

- Seventy-five percent of the country was destroyed.

- Six million people were killed.

- One hundred thousand Jewish people were saved by other Poles during the war. The consequence, if caught, was death for one's entire family.

- The notion of ethnicity in Central Europe is significantly different from an American's concept of ethnicity. Central Europeans view ethnicity as a pure thing. If one is Polish by blood line, they are always Polish even if they have never lived on Polish soil or even if they do not speak the language. Likewise, if one is of Lithuanian or Jewish heritage, and his or her family has only lived on Polish territory and speaks the language, he or she would not be considered Polish. Hence the concept of ethnic minority is quite different from the U.S. perspective.

- The first Nazi concentration camps were established in Germany before WWII. These camps "housed political prisoners, opponents of the regime, and others who were regarded for various reasons as dangerous to the Third Reich, people whom the Nazi authorities wanted to isolate and destroy both psychically and physically" (Swiebocki, 5).

- With the onset of war, the purpose of the camps changed. Many more camps were built and used as instruments of "terror, slave labor" and for the annihilation of the Jews.

- The most immediate and horrific fate was planned for European Jews. The German plan for the complete isolation and murder of European Jews was titled "The Final Solution to the Jewish Question" (Swiebocki, 5).

- Located in Poland, Auschwitz was the largest of the concentration camps. The camp was established in 1940 for Polish citizens, particularly those considered "dangerous and undesirable" by the Nazis. These undesirables were mainly "patriots, intellectuals and members of the resistance" who might have posed a threat to the Germans. Hence the camp was used for both P.O.W.s and the murder of the Jews (Swiebocki, 5).

- Of all the other non-Jewish prisoners of Auschwitz, the Poles suffered the most. Of the approximately 150,000 Polish prisoners, more than half were murdered (Swiebocki, 5). Three thousand of those were Polish priests.

- Poles could be arrested and sent to Auschwitz for the following reasons: "reading the underground press, listening to foreign radio, helping Jews, escaping from work, or having a hostile attitude towards Germans" (Swiebocki, 6).

- After 1941, German occupation spread to other countries. The Germans deported citizens of these other nations to Auschwitz (Swiebocki, 6).

- Other groups who fell victim to the Germans at Auschwitz included "gypsies, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals, convicts, and so-called antisocials" (Swiebocki, 6).

- Most Jews who arrived at Auschwitz for extermination had been lied to when leaving their homes and countries. They believed that they were being brought to "new settlements and work awaited them" (Swiebocki, 7).

- Criminal medical experiments also occurred in Auschwitz. "Men, women and children, mainly Jews and gypsies, were the experimental material" (Swiebocki, 7).

- It was the prisoners that helped each other survive the inhumanity that they experienced. "Crucial to the survival of prisoners were the everyday acts of friendship and mutual aid, the efforts to maintain human dignity which saw people through this hell in [Auschwitz]" (Swiebocki, 8)

- One of the most widely known acts of heroism at Auschwitz was performed by a Polish Franciscan Monk, Father Maksymilian Kolbe (Swiebocki, 8). In the summer of 1941 when a man was being put to death as an example of collective punishment for the escape of another prisoner, the randomly selected prisoner begged the SS to allow him to live as he had a wife and several children. Kolbe volunteered to take his place and was starved to death, thus saving the originally selected prisoner.

- For prisoners, hard work and hunger caused complete physical exhaustion. Starvation and sickness frequently ended in death. A day's ration was 1,300 - 1,700 calories. Breakfast usually included 1/2 liter of coffee and 1 liter of meatless soup made from rotten vegetables. Supper was typically 10-12 ounces of black clayed bread, 1 ounce of margarine, 20 grams of sausage and tea or coffee. At the time the camp was liberated by the Soviet Army on January 27, 1945, some of the women prisoners only weighed 50-65 pounds (Guide-book, 15).

<u>The Hungarian Holocaust:</u>
(Information for this section of my notes was taken solely from a lecture by Dr. R. Braham.)

- Anti-semitism spread widely following WWI due to the dislocation and separation of Hungarians that occurred as a result of lost territory.

- In the 1920's the first anti-semitic legislation was passed. It restricted the number of Jewish students in higher education, thus forcing Jews abroad to study. However, most Hungarian Universities ignored the law.

- In the 1930's anti-semitism increased in politics. Small political parties integrated to form the Arrow Cross party whose ideology was very close to Hitler's. They believed that the Jews must be annihilated. From 1938, the anti-semitic laws increased with the revisionist party.

- Hungary allied with Germany in WWII in order to gain lost territory. Hungary saw an alliance with Italy and Germany as a chance for territorial revisions. They believed that concessions like anti-semitic legislation would support their ultimate objective.

- Hungary had the largest surviving Jewish population in 1944 because of their early alliance with Germany.

- The Hungarians saw another solution to the Jewish question proposed by the Germans. Hungary supported Zionism seeing immigration as a solution.

- Despite Hitler's demands, Hungary refused to execute Jews.

- In 1943, Hungary tried to pull out of the war and join the Allies. As a result, in 1944 the Germans invaded Hungary to prevent them from changing sides.

- Six weeks following the April 1944 invasion by the Germans over 400,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz.

- One grievance that the Hungarians have with the Allied powers is that they did not bomb the railroad tracks to Auschwitz as they did not see it as a "strategic site".

- Almost the entire Hungarian Jewish population from the countryside was deported by July 7, 1944. No resistance was given as they were told that they were going to work for Germany. Budapest Jews were protected by leaders until 1944.

- According to some estimates, 440,000 - 550,000 Jews died while only 150,000 survived. Hungarian Jews who survived were not welcomed back by neighbors who had taken their property.

- Church groups and individuals helped Jews in isolation, and as in Poland, the punishment if caught assisting a Jew was death.

- Discussion of the horrors of the Hungarian holocaust did not begin in Hungary until the 1960's. Professor Braham attributes this in part to the fact that the war really did not end for Hungary until 1989 with the end of Soviet occupation.

**Slide Presentation and Lecture:**

The following is a description of slides taken at Auschwitz Birkenau and notes on pertinent information that corresponds with each picture. For the purposes of my unit, I will give this presentation during the reading of Night when Wiesel describes his arrival at Auschwitz. Slides can be purchased through the National Holocaust Museum in Washington. The sources of my information include Auschwitz: Voices From the Ground, The Auschwitz Birkenau Guide-Book, and notes from a guided tour of Auschwitz Birkenau.

**Part I: Auschwitz I - Parent camp to 40 smaller camps. Some parts of the camp were completely destroyed by the SS as they tried to cover any traces of their crimes (Guide-Book, 5).**

Slide # and Description

1. *The Main Gate*: Prisoners passed through this gate each day on their way to and from a work day of 12+ hours. The sign above the gate reads "Arbeit macht frei" - Work brings freedom.

2. *Enclosure*: This slide shows the perimeter of the camp with its wire fence.

3. *Electric Wires*: If a prisoner was to try an escape and was able to get beyond the gun shots of the guard towers, they would be electrocuted by the fence wires.

4. *Main Camp Alley*: This is the area in front of the kitchen where prisoners were marched out each day to work. Here a prisoner orchestra played to facilitate the daily cadence and mustering.

5. *Assembly Ground*: This is the area where prisoners were mustered and counted each day.

6. *History of Jewish Martyrology*: Many photographs were taken in 1944 by one of the SS soldiers during the extermination of the Hungarian Jews.

7. *Group Gallows*: A place of public execution creating more psychological terror for prisoners.

8. *Death Block*: "prison within a prison isolated from the rest of the camp" The Gestapo Police Court met on the first floor. Condemned prisoners were led to the wall for execution. Victims were forced to undress. " A prisoner could be punished for literally anything: for picking apples, for relieving himself during working hours. . . [or] for working too slowly. . ." (Guide-Book, 18).

9. *Portable Gallows*: Here public executions were carried out during roll call.

10. *Execution Wall*: Here the SS shot thousands of prisoners -- mostly Poles. In the yard of the "the prison within a prison", wood covered prison windows so no one could observe executions. The SS also "flogged and hung prisoners to special stakes by their arms which were bent behind their backs (Guide-Book, 17).

11./12. *Gas Chamber / Hole in Chamber Ceiling for Dispensing Gas*: The chambers were made to look like showers to camouflage the function. Nazis did this to "escape blame and to fool victims." About 2,000 victims were told to undress and were led into the 210 square meter room. After the room was sealed, SS soldiers poured Cyclon B into the chamber and the victims died within 15 to 20 minutes (Guide-Book, 9).

13. *Crematorium #1*: On the average 5,000 people were killed and cremated each day. By the summer of 1944, 24,000 Hungarian Jews were executed daily. Human ashes were used as fertilizer. Nothing was wasted by the Germans.

14. *Crematorium*: Following the removal of gold fillings, jewelry and hair from victims, the bodies were burned in the crematoriums. When there were too many for the ovens as in 1944 with the Hungarian Jews, makeshift pyres burned the corpses (Guide-Book, 9).

15. *Empty Cans of Cyclon B*: Twenty tons of Cyclon B was used at Auschwitz. 5-7 kg was needed to kill 1,500 people (Guide-Book, 10).

16./17. *Glasses / Hair*: All plundered goods were sent to Germany. Nothing was wasted. Russian liberators found 6 tons of human hair that was used to make cloth and mattresses. "Exhibits include prayer shawls, tooth brushes, shaving brushes, shoes, suitcases with the names and addresses of the deported Jews, bowls, artificial limbs, infant toys, etc." (Guide-Book, 12).

**<u>Part II: Auschwitz II Birkenau</u> 3 km. from the main camp in the village of Brezezinka. The camp covers 425 acres.**

1. *SS Main Guard House* - Birkenau was built when Auschwitz I was not large enough to hold the amount of prisoners that the Germans had taken. It also was able to better facilitate the execution of the Jews with over 300 buildings including four crematoriums and gas chambers.

2. *Death's Gate*: 80% of Birkenau Prisoners were executed immediately upon arrival to the camp.

3. *Camp Barracks*: There were brick barracks for the women with no foundations or floors. They would sleep on 3 tier berths with 8 women to a level. The men slept in wood barracks that once served as field stables for 52 horses. These stables accommodated 1,000 prisoners with a minimum of modifications. Chimneys were added, but the prisoners rarely were given wood to survive the chilling winters (Guide-Book, 22-23).

4. *Bathroom*: The living conditions were so inadequate that most prisoners survived only a few months. "Hunger, appalling sanitation and hygiene, lack of proper clothes and medicines and unbelievable work loads killed many of the captives" (Swiebocki, 6). The bathrooms were poorly planned, and there was no sewer system. Once full, dirty toilets would be emptied by hand with buckets. Obviously, everyone tried not to be the last to use a toilet before it filled.

5/6. *Fragment of the Concentration Camp Enclosure / Main Entrance*: Train engineers were supposed to back the train into the camp. There the prisoners would be unloaded. Supposedly, this was to keep the engineers from knowing the nature of their cargo and the camps.

7. *Railroad Tracks*: "Special practice at Auschwitz was to make a selection on the railway platform" After leaving their bags, the Jews would be forced to parade before an SS Doctor. He would determine their individual physical fitness and with a point of his finder would determine a person's fate -- immediate death or slave labor (Swiebocki, 7).

8. *Ruins of the Crematorium*: The crematoriums were destroyed by the retreating SS army as they tried to conceal their crimes (Guide-Book, 24).

9. *Surrounding Town: Brezezinka* : Just beyond the wild flower dotted fields that surround the camp are homes. Frequently driven roads are on the periphery of the camp.

10. *International Monument to the Victims*

**Holocaust Poetry and Journal Prompts:**

The following writing prompts and poems are intended to complement the reading of Night by Elie Wiesel. Students will respond to the various prompts and poems at different points in their reading of Wiesel's autobiographical account of the Holocaust.

Journal Prompt #1:

The Holocaust has left an indelible wound on the world. Stories of heroes in the midst of the horror give us hope for the human condition. Given your reading of Night by Wiesel and the poem " In Memory of Janusz Korczak" by Ficowski, reflect on the efforts of adults who strived to protect children in the midst of terror.

Journal Prompt #2:

Looking back on the incidents of the Holocaust, it is easy to place blame and question how people could stand by while their nighbors were being murdered. After reading "I Did Not Manage to Save" by Ficowski, reflect upon the communal guilt of the world when the truths of the Nazi crimes were fully revealed.

Journal Prompt #3:

Hitler is a name that when heard calls to mind images of hate and death. However, in Szymborska's poem, "Hitler's First Photograph", we are reminded that Hitler's parents raised him with the hopes we all have for our own children. As a world community of adults, what is our responsibility to children with regards to creating a world where no one can be allowed to reign in terror as Hitler did? What must we teach our children so that they will neither lead like he did, nor follow anyone like him?

Journal Prompt #4:

After reading Elie Wiesel's account of his march from Auschwitz to Buchenwald in Night and reflecting upon "Harbach 1944" by Pilinszky and "Forced March" and "Clouded Sky" by Radnoti, discuss the paradox of hope and despair faced by prisoners as they marched in unimaginable conditions unacknowledged by the communities they passed through.

Journal Prompt #5:

Read "Pigtail" by Rozewicz. Dehumanization through both psychological and physical terror were a means of controlling the prisoners in the concentration camps. Immediately upon arrival to camps, prisoners heads were shaved. In what ways do people in your school or neighborhood commit subtle acts that are dehumanizing to individuals? (For example: making fun of people who are different; telling ethnic jokes) What is the responsiblitiy of indiviudals to prevent such dehumanizing and hurtful behaviors?

Journal Prompt #6:

After reading about Wiesel's crisis of faith in Night and reflecting on "Smoke Rose" by Yaoz-Kest, discuss whether or not you think you would have been able to maintain faith in God or simply in "goodness" had you lived through such horror. Do you think that such suffering can ever be healed?

Journal Prompt #7:

After completing Wiesel's Night and reading "Night Over Birkenau" by Borowski and "Never Shall I Forget" by Wiesel, discuss the metaphorical use of night in these three works.

## 5.8.1942 In Memory of Janusz Korczak*

What did the Old Doctor do
in the cattle wagon
bound for Treblinka on the fifth of August
over the few hours of the bloodstream
over the dirty river of time.

I do not know.

what did Charon of his own free will
the ferryman without an oar do
did he give out to the children
what remained of gasping breath
and leave for himself
only frost down the spine

I do not know.

did he lie to them for instance
in small
numbing doses
groom the sweaty little heads
for the surrying lice of fear

I do not know

yet for all that yet later yet there
in Treblinka
all their terror all the tears
were against him

oh it was only now
just so many minutes say a lifetime
whether a little or a lot
I was not there I do not know

suddenly the Old Doctor saw
the children had grown
as old as he was
older and older
that was how fast they had to go grey as ash

***Jerzy Ficowski*** *(Translated by Keith Bosley)*
*Ficowski was a Polish poet who served in the Polish arm in the war.*
*"His work is particularly focused on the sufferings of the gypsies*
*and the victims of the Holocaust in Poland" (Schiff, 63 & 21).*

•Janusz Korczak: 1878-1942, physician, educator, writer, born in Warsaw of assimilated Jewish family. Up until World War II he ran two orphanages - one Jewish, the other non-Jewish. During the war, he was removed from the non-Jewish orphanage. "He tried to ignore the Nazi occupation of Poland and refused to wear the Yellow Badge, for which he was jailed for a while." He also did not allow his friends to smuggle him out of the ghetto as he would not allow his orphans to "face their fate alone." Hence, when the Germans came for Korxzak, his staff, and his 200 children, he marched away with them "holding a child's hand in each of his." They were all killed together upon arrival at Treblinka (Schiff, 63).

## I Did Not Manage To Save

I did not manage to save
a single life

I did not know how to stop
a single bullet

and I wander round cemeteries
which are not there

I look for words
which are not there
I run

to help where no one called
to rescue after the event

I want to be on time
even if I am too late

***Jerzy Ficowski*** *(Translated by Keith Bosley & Krystyna Wandycz)*
*(Schiff, 86)*

**Hitler's First Photograph**

And WHO's this little fellow in his itty-bitty robe?
That's tiny baby Adolf, the Hitlers' little boy!
Will he grow up to be an LL.D?
Or a tenor in Vienna's Opera House?
Whose teensy hand is this, whose little ear and eye and nose?
Whose tummy full of milk, we just don't know:
printer's, doctor's, merchant's, priest's
Where will those tootsy-wottsies finally wander?
To a garden, to a school, to an office, to a bride,
maybe to the Burgermeister's daughter?

Precious little angel, mommy's sunshine, honeybun,
while he was being born a year ago,
there was no dearth of signs on the earth and in the sky:
spring sun, geraniums in windows,
the organ-grinder's music in the yard,
a lucky fortune wrapped in rosy paper,
then just before the labor his mother's fateful dream:
a dove seen in a dream means joyful news,
if it is caught, a long-awaited guest will come.
Knock knock, who's there, it's Adolf's heartchen knocking.

A little pacifier, diaper, rattle, bib,
our bouncing boy, thank God and knock on wood, is well,
looks just like his folks, like a kitten in a basket,
like the tots in every other family album.
Shush, let's not start crying, sugar,
the camera will click from under that black hood.

The Klinger Atelier, Grabenstrasse, Braunau,
and Braunau is a small but worthy town,
honest businesses, obliging neighbors,
smell of yeast dough, of gray soap.
No one hears howling dogs, or fate's footsteps.
A history teacher loosens his collar
and yawns over homework.

***Wislawa Szymborska***
*Szymborska is a Polish poet who won the*
Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996. (Baranczak, 74)

## Harbach 1944

At all times I see them.
The moon brilliant. A black shaft looms up.
Beneath it, harnessed men
haul an immense cart.

Dragging that giant wagon
which grows bigger as the night grows
their bodies are divided among
the dust, their hunger and their trembling.

They are carrying the road, they are carrying the land,
the bleak potato fields,
and all they know is the weight of everything,
the burden of the skylines

and the falling bodies of their companions
which almost grown into their own
as they lurch, living layers,
treading each other's footsteps.

The villages stay clear of them,
the gateways withdraw.
The distance, that has come to meet them,
reels away back.

Staggering, they wade knee deep
in the low, darkly-muffled clatter
of their wooden clogs
as through invisible leaf litter.

Already their bodies belong to silence.
And they thrust their faces towards the height
as if they strained for a scent
of the faraway celestial troughs

because, prepared for their coming
like an opened cattle-yard,
its gates flung savagely back,
death gapes to its hinges.

***Janos Pilinszky*** *(Translated by Ted Hughes)*
*Hungarian poet who spent some time in the camps during the war. He "identified with Holocaust victims throughout his writing career" (Schiff, 49 & 214).*

**Forced March**

You're crazy. You fall down, stand up and walk again,
your ankles and your knees move pain that wanders around,
but you start again as if you had wings.
The ditch calls you, but it's no use you're afraid to stay,
and if someone asks why, maybe you turn around and say
that a woman and a sane death a better death wait for you.
But you're crazy. For a long time now
only the burned wind spins above the houses at home,
Walls lie on their backs, plum trees are broken
and the angry night is thick with fear.
Oh, if I could believe that everything valuable
is not only inside me now that there's still home to go back to.
If only there were! And just as before bees drone peacefully
on the cool veranda, plum preserves turn cold
and over sleepy gardens quietly, the end of summer bathes in the sun.
Among the leave the fruit swing naked
and in front of the rust-brown hedge blonde Fanny waits for me,
this morning writes slow shadows-
All this could happen! The moon is so round today!
Don't walk past me, friend. Yell, and I'll stand up again!

*September 15, 1944* ***Miklos Radnoti*** *(Translated by Steven Polgar, S. Berg & S.J. Marks)*
*Hungarian Poet of Jewish decent -- During the war he was imprisoned in a concentration camp in Yugoslavia. His body along with a notebook of poems*
*was found in a mass grave in Northwest Hungary (Schiff, 426& 215).*

**Clouded Sky**

the moon hangs on a clouded sky.
I am surprised that I live.
Anxiously and with great care, death looks for us
and those it finds are all terribly white.

Sometimes a year looks back and howls
then drops to its knees.
Autumn is too much for me. It waits again
and winter waits with its dull pain.

The forest bleeds. The hours bleed.
Time spins overhead
and the wind scrawls
big dark numbers on the snow.

But I am still here
and I know why and why the air feels heavy -
a warm silence full of tiny noises circles me
just as it was before my birth.

I stop at the foot of a tree,
Its leaves cry with anger.
A branch reaches down. Is it strangling me?
I am not a coward. I am not weak, I am

tired. And silent. And the branch
is also mute and afraid as it enters my hair.
I should forget it, but I
forget nothing.

Clouds pour across the moon. Anger
leaves a poisonous dark-green bruise on the sky.
I roll myself a cigarette,
slowly, carefully. I live.

*June 8, 1940* ***Miklos Radnoti*** *(translated by Steven Polgar, S. Berg & S.J. Marks)*
*(Schiff, 46)*

## Pigtail

When all the women in the transport
had their heads shaved
four workmen with brooms made of birch twigs
swept up
and gathered up the hair

Behind clean glass
the stiff hair lies
of those suffocated in gas chambers
there are pins and side combs
in this hair

The hair is not shot through with light
is not parted by the breeze
is not touched by any hand
or rain or lips

In huge chests
clouds of dry hair
of those suffocated
and a faded plait
a pigtail with a ribbon
pulled at school
by naughty boys.

***Tadeusz Rozewicz*** *(Translated by Adam Czerniawski)*
*Rozewicz was a Polish poet who was involved in the Polish resistance during the war (Schiff, 71).*

## Smoke Rose

Smoke
rose
in the garden.
God watched
from above,
and fear walked
in the cool
of the day.

***Itamar Yaoz-Kest*** *(Translated by Glenda Abramson)*
*Hebrew poet born in Hungary. He was imprisoned in Bergen Belsen in 1944-45. (Schiff, 179 & 219)*

**Night over Birkenau**

Night again. Again the grim sky closes
circling like a vulture over the dead silence.
Like a crouching beast over the camp
the moon sets, pale as a corpse.

And like a shield abandoned in battle,
blue Orion - lost among the stars.
The transports growl in darkness
and the eyes of the crematorium blaze.

It's steamy, stifling. Sleep is a stone.
Breath rattles in my throat.
This lead foot crushing my chest
is the silence of three million dead.

Night, night without end. No dawn comes.
My eyes are poisoned from sleep.
Like God's judgment on the corpse of the earth,
fog descends over Birkenau.

***Tadeusz Borowski*** *(Translated by Tadeusz Pioro)*
*Polish poet who survived his imprisonment in Dachau and Auscwitz by "in a very lowly capacity, to administer the death regimes in these institutions." He committed suicide in 1951.(Schiff, 55 & 208).*

**Never Shall I Forget**

Never shall I forget that night,
the first night in the camp
which has turned my life into one long night,
seven times cursed and seven times sealed.

Never shall I forget that smoke.
Never shall I forget the little faces of the children
whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke
beneath a silent blue sky.

Never shall I forget those flames
which consumed my faith for ever.
Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence
which deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.

Never shall I forget those moments
which murdered my God and my soul
and turned my dreams to dust.

Never shall I forget these things,
even if I am condemned to live
as long as God Himself.

Never.

***Elie Wiesel***

*Wiesel is a Jewish poet born in Hungary. During the war his family was deported to Auschwitz where he alone survived. In 1986 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for his book, Night, which describes the crimes of Auschwitz (Schiff, 42 & 219).*

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